

BELOW THE DEAD LINE

BY SCOTT CAMPBELL.

The Case of the Tan Glove

"No, no, Jimmie, you can't keep a good man down," smiled Mr. Felix Boyd. "It's utterly impossible. You may get him down, mind you, and by fixing a cast iron grip upon him you may, perhaps, keep him down for a time. But the instant you loose your hold, take my word for it, Jimmie, he'll bob up serenely from under your arm, or betwixt your legs, or from some utterly unexpected quarter, and have at you again. No, no, Jimmie, you can't keep a good man down."

The central office man smiled complacently over his Blue Points, in the consumption of which he was too diligently absorbed to reply, and Felix Boyd presently added, in ruminating mood:

"So it is with the Big Finger, Jimmie. We've had him down half a score of times in the past year, or as good as down, and in each case every case, just before its culmination, just before our final blow was dealt, we'd have waged our very lives against his escape."

"So we would, Felix," admitted Coleman, with a dubious nod.

"Yet in each and every case, Jimmie, he has slipped like an eel through our fingers," continued Boyd. "Owing to no fault of ours, mind you, no lack of precaution or shrewdness on our part, but merely because Satan, so it seems to me, often derives infinite satisfaction from serving his own at such critical moments."

"Very likely," laughed Coleman. "That's surely a philosophical way of looking at it."

"I think so, Jimmie."

"He certainly is a good man, this Big Finger, or he never could balked and baffled you as he has done. Yes, he's a good man—in his infernal bad line."

"And, as I said in the beginning, Jimmie, you can't keep a good man down," added Boyd, a bit grimly. "Take my word for it, the cover will slip again before we fairly know it, and, like an ugly jack-in-the-box, the Big Finger will again bob up, to give us renewed anxiety and additional trouble."

"Think so, Felix?"

"I do, indeed, Jimmie," nodded Boyd. "Idleness is as alien to that evil genius as beneficence is to a hog. We certainly shall hear from him again."

"Yet a month has passed since that Sing Sing affair, resulting from the convict code."

"A month is but little in the life of a man."

"That's true enough, Felix. Yet we succeeded in landing every man of his gang—save him alone."

"Humph! He soon will organize another."

"Do you believe it?"

"It's as sure as death and taxes, Jimmie. A month, did you say? Yes, so it is. Two weeks in Bellevue, nursing a brace of broken ribs; and two weeks recuperating in the Adirondacks. I marvel that the Big Finger did not seize the opportunity presented by my absence, to develop and execute one of his infernally crafty and—Hello! break off for a moment, Jimmie! I've an idea that yonder men are talking of me."

And Felix Boyd bent a furtive glance in the direction of two young men, who were seated at lunch in the main room of the cafe.

The scene was a popular downtown restaurant, within a few blocks of the busy section of New York included below the dead-line, the territory specially assigned to Detective Coleman of the central office, and the field of most of Felix Boyd's remarkable exploits.

It was, as Coleman had said, just a month since that great police raid designed and directed by Boyd, which had resulted in the wholesale capture of the gang of accomplished crooks dominated by the notorious Big Finger, whose criminal operations below the dead-line long had been a menace to every great financial institution there located.

As previously related, the escape of this obscure master criminal had been entirely accidental, a mishap which had cost Felix Boyd not only his chief prisoner, but also two broken ribs and other less serious injuries.

The couple referred to by Boyd, as above noted, appeared to be discussing some object which one of them had produced from a small waist coat pocket, taken from his top pocket, and which had led his companion to glance occasionally in Boyd's direction. Returning it after a brief examination, he remarked, with a smile:

"It looks all right, Gerry. In my opinion, the diamond is a valuable one."

Gerry replaced the glittering gem in the waist of cotton, then jammed it back into his pocket.

"Glad to hear you say so, Delmore," he rejoined.

"As a matter of fact, however, my opinion is valueless, for I am not a judge of precious stones," added Delmore, who was a reputable Wall street broker of the younger set. "But there's a very easy way of getting at the truth."

"How so?"

"Submit the stone to Mr. Felix Boyd. He very quickly will pass upon it for you, and his judgment is infallible."

"Mr. Felix Boyd?"

"Don't you know him?"

"I can't say that I do."

"Delmore's brow was creased perceptibly. 'Humph! Is that so?' he murmured, surprisedly. 'I thought everybody knew Felix Boyd.'"

"I have been abroad for three years," remarked Gerry, with apologetic humility. "What about this man—Mr. Felix Boyd?"

Delmore dipped his fingers into the cut glass bowl the waiter had placed before them, then deliberately dried them with his napkin.

"Well, Gerry," he presently rejoined, "one might say a good deal about Felix Boyd, and then leave much unsaid. There are few, indeed, who could tell it all; for Boyd, and his secret relations with some of the financial kings of Wall street, are mysteries yet to be unveiled. If you have finished your lunch, Gerry, I will introduce you to him. He sits at the single table in the alcove yonder, with Detective Coleman of the central office."

"I'll go with you at once," said Gerry. "They are coming this way, Felix," said Coleman, as the two men approached.

"So I see, Jimmie."

"Know them?"

"One only—Young Delmore. His father is on my list of clients."

Boyd did not so much as glance up when the two men drew near, yet Delmore at once said familiarly:

"How are you, Mr. Boyd? I hope we don't intrude. I wish to introduce a friend of mine, Talbot Gerry. He has just returned from a three-year jaunt abroad, and I wish you to know him."

Boyd's drooping lids were raised with indolent interest, yet his gaze lingered oddly for a moment upon Gerry's face. He laid aside his napkin, with lips relaxing to a smile, and extended his hand.

"Pleased to know you, Mr. Gerry," said he. "I was in Algiers two years ago last Thursday."

Gerry started slightly, then laughed. "Well, really, Mr. Boyd," he exclaimed. "That's curious. I confess I was in Algiers about that time."

"At precisely that time, Mr. Gerry," smiled Boyd. "I was there seeking an antique Moorish simitar, which I wished to add to my collection. I observed you only by chance."

"Well, we must have an excellent memory, Mr. Boyd, to have recalled the date so readily."

"Tolerably good, yes. What's the news, Delmore?"

And Felix Boyd bowed and smiled to the one, turned conventionally to the other, and then relapsed into his former indifference much as if the episode had ended.

"Nothing new, Boyd," replied Delmore. "By the way, Gerry, let's see that stone. We'll ask Mr. Boyd's opinion of it."

"Delighted, I am sure," cried Gerry, hastening to produce the waif of cotton.

"Have a look at this, Mr. Boyd, will you? You are said to be a judge of such things, and we'd like to know what you make of it. I call it a diamond, and a very good one."

Mr. Felix Boyd accepted the proffered gem, and studied it for several moments in the palm of his hand. Presently he looked up and said:

"Where did you get this stone, Mr. Gerry?"

Gerry colored deeply, then covered his momentary embarrassment with a laugh.

"Well, to tell the truth, Mr. Boyd, I loaned an acquaintance forty dollars last night, and accepted that stone as collateral."

"He was a bit hard up, eh?" smiled Boyd, with a sharper glint in his lifted eyes.

"So it appeared."

"A friend of yours?"

"Well—not exactly," faltered Gerry. "Merely an acquaintance."

"Been long acquainted with him?"

Gerry laughed again, rather half-heartedly.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Boyd, I never saw him until last evening. I ran across him while doing the town in a rather rakish fashion and we traveled a bit in company. Incidentally he complained of being temporarily strapped, and I made the loan mentioned."

"Naturally you learned his name?"

"The name he gave me, in return for my card, was Peterson. Yet I cannot say it was reliable, nor where he now may be found."

"That is very much to be regretted," said Boyd, with curious intonation.

"Why so, sir? Is there any doubt about the stone?"

Boyd rolled the glittering bauble across the damask table toward his questioner.

"The stone is a production of art, Mr. Gerry, not of nature," said he, with quiet significance. "It is one of the best artificial diamonds I ever saw."

"Artificial?"

"Precisely. Yet it is so good that it might deceive even a practised eye. As I remarked, Mr. Gerry, it is much to be regretted that you cannot locate your friend of last evening, should you again encounter him. I would suggest that you have him detained by the police."

"I'll do that, at least," exclaimed Gerry, quite red and heated.

"Delmore, I feel the need of a stimulant. Will you join us, Mr. Boyd?"

"I think not now, thank you," said Boyd, smiling. "Some other time, if agreeable to you."

"Charmed at any time, I assure you."

Boyd gazed after the two men as they left the room. Only his eyes betrayed his quickened interest. They had taken on a gleam like that reflected from a polished blade in the moonlight.

Presently he drew out a leather notebook, and with a pencil jotted down the name of Mr. Talbot Gerry.

"What do you make of that, Felix?" inquired Coleman curiously.

"It is another of those paste diamonds, Jimmie, of which I told you," he replied.

"This is the second I have seen yet. I plainly could have learned no more than before concerning the maker. He must be found—located—annihilated. His art is dangerous. His skill is great. Such imitations threaten the financial safety of every jeweler in the world. I again must warn my clients in that line of the existence of these remarkable counterfeits. Are you through, Jimmie? Come, then. I'll attend to this very day."

Coleman had merely nodded in response to the question, and the two men left the restaurant in company. As they emerged to the sunlit street, the clock at that hour was hurrying people, Boyd briefly paused and asked:

"Where now, Jimmie?"

"I'm going up to headquarters for a spell," replied Coleman. "I have a report to turn in, and two letters to write."

"Shall I see you later?"

"I'll drop into your office about five."

"So long, then."

The central office man bowed and departed.

Boyd lingered for several moments in the restaurant doorway, with his brows knit in thought. He had in mind the artificial gem he had just seen, a most remarkable imitation of a genuine diamond, and he was quicker to discern the alarming possibilities such counterfeits afford.

Boyd had on his list of clients several wealthy diamond importers and brokers of Maiden Lane, as well as two large retail jewelry houses; and of them, too, he was thinking, and of the warning with which he might serve them.

Thus coming events at times cast their shadows before. For as Boyd presently turned to depart, he suddenly observed his office boy, Terence Gowan, bolting across the street toward him.

"Gosh! I'm just in the nick of time," gasped Terry, flushed and well-nigh breathless. "You're wanted at once, Mr. Boyd."

Boyd's clean-cut, attractive face changed like a flash, instantly taking on that flinty, determined look which invariably characterized him when engaged by any professional emergency.

"By whom?" he curtly demanded, with eyes dilating.

"Dabney & Co., sir, Maiden Lane," cried Terry, with amazing volubility.

"They sent a messenger to your office, and I rushed here to."

"Stop a bit! Do you know what has happened at Dabney's?"

"Not sure, sir. A big swipe of diamonds, I think the messenger said. He waited only a moment—"

"Which is longer than I should wait," interrupted Boyd, with startling vehemence, when the diamonds were mentioned. "Here, you, cabbie, this way!"



SHE RECALLED AS IF STRUCK WITH A WHIP

I may want you, Terry, so in with you. Don't spare your horse-dish, cabbie. A dollar a minute—that's your fee! To Dabney & Co., jewelers, Maiden Lane, at the top of your speed!"

Then a bang of the closed door—and a vehicle tearing through the crowded street.

Passing people stared and wondered.

II.

A dollar a minute was not an extravagant fee for Felix Boyd to have offered his cabman, for scarce three minutes had passed when the carriage drew down at the curbing fronting the great retail jewelry store of Messrs. Dabney & Co., in those days one of the noteworthy attractions of Maiden Lane.

"Wait here, cabbie," commanded Boyd, as he sprang out upon the sidewalk. "You, Terry, follow me in, as I may want you. Display no interest in my doings, however."

"Not I, sir," rejoined the lad. "Trust me for that."

Boyd entered like an ordinary customer, yet strode quite briskly down one of the broad aisles between the splendid counters, with only cursory glances at the magnificent display of merchandise on every side.

Yet before Boyd had passed half through the long aisle, he was hurriedly approached by an elderly, distinguished-looking man, obviously much agitated, who whispered rapidly as he grasped Boyd's arm:

"This way, quick! Thank Heaven you're here! I despatched a messenger for you at once. We have been swindled."

"Hush! Be prudent!" growled Boyd with a reprehensive glance at the man. "Whatever the occasion of your agitation, Mr. Dabney, it cannot warrant the slightest betrayal of our secret business relations. Compose yourself at once."

In order to dispel the misgivings of any observer, for the popular store was filled with customers at that hour, Boyd fell to laughing softly before the man, and the man addressed, who was the head and front of the famous firm, at once took the cue so quietly given him.

"Ah, true!" he softly exclaimed, on an attempt to force a smile to his pale face. "I will be more discreet, Mr. Boyd."

"What is the trouble? Quietly."

"I have just been robbed of a dozen valuable diamond rings—swindled in a most absurd manner."

"How and by whom?"

"By a woman who pretended she wished to make a purchase. She was shown a tray of very valuable rings, many of which she briefly examined, and then she disappeared."

"Twelve of the rings, and substitute in their places twelve almost perfect duplicates as regards settings. The stones themselves contain, however, while of nearly the same size as those stolen, are imitations only, of a most remarkable character."

"Ha! So I'm too late!" Boyd ejaculated. "I came here to warn you of these imitations. I have done so once before, Mr. Dabney, as you may remember."

"True—that is true. I should have been more guarded. Yet my clerks are experienced, and are thoroughly trustworthy. I could not have believed such a theft possible."

"There are some very clever knaves at work about here nowadays, Mr. Dabney," said Boyd pointedly. "These remarkable imitations—"

"Oh, they completely deceived Mr. Gibson, my clerk, and the woman's dexterity in substituting the bogus rings must have been extraordinary," groaned Dabney, under his breath. "I went to question Gibson soon after the woman departed, wondering if she had made a purchase, and I then discovered the fraud."

"How long ago?"

"Barely half an hour."

"What is the value of the stolen goods?"

"More than \$3,000."

"I will talk with Gibson and see what may be done," said Boyd. "Wait one moment, Mr. Dabney."

"Well—"

"Allow me to do all of the talking with Gibson, and present me to him, and remark the facts, entirely as if your disclosure of the loss were merely incidental. I do not wish Gibson to infer that I am in your service. Leave me to get at the facts, in so far as he can impart them. I can do so better than you."

Dabney slightly inclined his gray head, and yielded to Boyd's restraining hand as the two approached a counter somewhat removed. A middle-aged man of frank countenance stood behind it, who anxiously regarded his employer as the two men drew near. Half-an-eye convinced Felix Boyd, who was a keen physiognomist, that the clerk was honest.

Let me see that tray of rings again, Gibson," said Mr. Dabney, halting Boyd at the counter. "This gentleman is an expert, and I wish to submit them to him. I have told him of the swindle by which I fear we have been victimized."

Gibson hastened to bring the desired tray from a vault in the wall, and with agitated hands placed it upon the broad glass show case.

"I can never forgive myself," he groaned, with a hopeless look at Boyd's firm, inscrutable face.

From their dark background of plush, each ring occupying a tiny slot in the tray, which was invariably kept filled to prevent any undetected theft by an examiner of them, half a hundred costly solitaires glared and blazed with dazzling radiance, as if with a life and soul of their own.

Boyd bowed above the tray, and for several moments studied its contents. Then, with the tip of his pencil, one after the other, he raised twelve of the rings from the slots, and dropped them upon a square piece of velvet on the showcase.

"Victimized—yes, Mr. Dabney, there is no doubt of it," said he, glancing up. "Just a dozen, sir, you said. I do not much wonder that your clerk did not detect the substituted imitations; they are extraordinarily good. By the way, Mr. Gibson, are there any previous circumstances bearing upon the prospective sale which led you to show this tray of rings to the woman who, I understand, has stolen some of them?"

"You may state any facts to this gentleman, Gibson," remarked Mr. Dabney.

"My clerk hastened to reply."

"I never saw the woman before today," said he. "About a week ago, however, a young man called and examined these rings, saying that he intended to buy one. He did not make a selection that day, but said he would call again in the course of a week and do so."

"Well—"

"He called this morning, sir, about 12 o'clock, and I again showed him the rings. Finally, he selected one, asking me to remember it, and said that he wished his wife to call and see it before he made the purchase. He said that she would call about 2 o'clock today, and I gave him one of my cards."

"Go on, Mr. Gibson."

"Just before 2 o'clock a young lady approached the counter here and presented the same card, requesting me to show her the rings at which her husband had been looking. Naturally, sir, I had no suspicion, and readily complied. She examined the tray of rings, and we discussed them together, possibly occupying a quarter hour, yet not for a moment did I lose sight of the tray, or of her. She finally decided that her husband had made a desirable selection, and said she would at once send

him a note, advising him to call and get the ring on his way home today. I left it should be sold to another. I provided her with paper and pencil, and she wrote the note, and immediately departed. Alas, sir, we since have discovered—"

"One moment, Mr. Gibson," Boyd interposed, now that he had got most of the man's story. "The method adopted by the swindlers is very obvious. The young man first called to study the tray of rings, that counterfeits might be made with which to deceive you. His visit this morning was calculated only to pave the way for his wife, thus tending in a measure to relax your vigilance. She evidently is a woman of superior nerve and exceeding dexterity, eyes blue, and she must have palmed the genuine rings, and disposed of them on her person, substituting only the counterfeits."

"It appears so," groaned Gibson, wringing his hands. "I could not have believed it possible, however."

"Kindly answer a few questions for me, Mr. Gibson. First describe the young man."

"He appeared to be about 25, of medium height and build. He was rather boyish-looking, as I recall him, wearing neither beard nor mustache. I should say his complexion was light, his eyes blue, and his voice somewhat effeminate."

"How about the woman, Mr. Gibson?"

"She, too, was young, sir, and very pretty. She was fashionably dressed, and I naturally supposed her to be a young lady of wealth. She was rather above medium size, I should say, with fascinating eyes and a most alluring smile. I think of no special features by which she could be identified, nor any."

"One moment, please. How long since she departed?"

"Possibly half an hour."

"Were there any names mentioned?"

"None, sir."

"Perhaps you supposed the two parties to be a recently married couple?"

"That was precisely my impression, sir."

"Quite in order, I'm sure," nodded Boyd. "Really Mr. Dabney, the case seems to present no very encouraging features."

"None at all that I can see," was the dubious reply, as the soundless shadows certainly have gotten well away with the goods."

"If you had but a single clue to offer the—"

"Oh, stay! that glove!" cried Mr. Dabney, abruptly. "Possibly that will suggest something to Mr. Boyd."

"Ah, what is this?" cried Boyd, with a second warning glance at the impatient speaker.

Gibson had produced from behind the counter a fashionably tan glove, lady's size, slightly worn and soiled. As he laid it upon the showcase in front of Boyd, he quickly rejoined:

"It was dropped by the woman, sir, while she was writing the note mentioned. I did not discover it until she had gone, then saw it lying near the lacquer table yonder."

"You are sure that it was hers?" inquired Boyd.

"Absolutely! She had both gloves in her hand while examining the tray of rings."

"Oh, very likely," growled Boyd, pointedly. "Possibly some of the purloined rings found their way into the other glove. A pity, too, it had not been this one. It bears no mark by which to track her. Medium size, however, and of French make. You say she sat at yonder table while writing the note?"

And Boyd glanced again at a small, highly polished table which stood in the aisle, with one of the counter chairs still beside it.

"Yes, yes," replied Gibson. "She occupied that chair. I provided her with

a single sheet of paper which I happened to have here, and loaned her my pencil. She said she did not require any envelope, as she would send the note to her husband's office by her footman."

Boyd did not appear to have heard the last. Several of the store clerks had gathered in a group near-by, and those standing nearest to him saw, or thought they saw, one swift, intensified gleam, as sharp as an electric flash, leap up from the depths of his frowning, gray eyes.

It was gone in an instant, however, and Boyd then dropped into the chair the thief had occupied, and proceeded to make a closer inspection of her tan glove—the one and only tangible clue to the mysterious pair of swindlers.

"Footman, eh?" he presently croaked, plainly indicating that he had heard, despite appearances. "She came in a carriage, then?"

"So I inferred," replied Gibson.

"You did not see the vehicle?"

"I did not, sir. Wishing to replace the tray of rings in the vault as soon as possible, I did not accompany her to the door."

There was a brief period of silence, the more strained because of the obvious mental absorption of the men in the chair. Felix Boyd sat tipping the small, polished table to and fro, with his brows knit, his lips drawn and his gaze vacantly fixed upon the dainty bit of furniture. Through one of the broad plate-glass windows near-by the glare of light fell full upon its polished surface, and accentuated with its reflection Boyd's startled set and forceful face.

Presently he started abruptly and glanced at his watch, finding it to be nearly half-past two.

"Suppose you bring those twelve bogus rings into your private office, Mr. Dabney," said he carelessly, as he arose. "An examination under a lens may reveal something."

"Possibly," admitted Dabney; yet for his life he could not have told what advantage was thus to be derived. "You may put them in a small box for me, Mr. Gibson."

"I will take along this tan glove, also," remarked Boyd, sauntering away in advance.

As he approached the end of one of the counters, however, at which Terry Gowan was staring idly into a showcase, Boyd's indifference suddenly took wings. His hand closed upon the lad's arm with a grip that betrayed his suppressed energy, and he bowed to whisper rapidly: